Poly brings student portfolios into the 21st century

Lauren Rabaino
MUSTANG DAILY

A rising trend among universities nationwide is a push for online portfolios, also known as e-portfolios, for students to use in their job search. "E-portfolios are an educational tool that more and more schools, colleges and universities worldwide are adopting," said Associate Vice Provost for Academic Programs Cheryl Ney via an e-mail interview. "They have a variety of uses. Students are using them for their resumes and apparently there are some companies that are now asking for them as part of the interview process."

On a small scale, Cal Poly already has a class that teaches the basics of e-portfolio creation. Jack Phelan, a kinesiology professor with a background in producing and filmmaking, is an early adopter of the concept. He introduced the course KINE 470 "Media and Technology in Science and Human Performance" to Cal Poly this year to help students market themselves to a fast-paced, information-driven world.

It's an idea that's never really caught on, at least in the United States, but it may be gaining traction with the economy in deep recession.

On Tuesday, Hartwick College, a liberal arts school in Oneonta, N.Y., became perhaps the most high-profile school yet to announce it would offer a broad range of students the opportunity to finish a bachelor's degree in three years, saving a full year of tuition and fees (which run $42,705 there this year). A three-year degree "would be attractive to someone who knows right now what they want to do with the rest of their lives," said Lincoln Morris, Upper Iowa University president, pressed college presidents to offer three-year degrees. In Rhode Island, legislators are considering a bill that would create a standard set of college-level classes for high schools, so all students could have an opportunity to finish college in three years.

Three years is the norm for undergraduate degrees in Europe, and a handful of U.S. colleges offer variants of a three-year program, including Judson College in Alabama, Manchester College in Indiana, and Seattle University. Others, such as Bates College in Maine, offer highly qualified students some three-year options. And of course, at many schools, students with a large number of Advanced Placement credits may be able to graduate early.

Still, the idea has hardly caught fire, despite rising college costs. Students seem to like spending four years in college.

When Upper Iowa University offered the option a few years ago, just five students took it — but all decided to stay four years after all. Nobody has signed up since.

A three-year "degree would be attractive to someone who knows right now what they want to do with the rest of their lives," said Lincoln Morris, Upper Iowa's vice president for enrollment management. "It's almost like a break out of their resumes," Phelan said. "But it goes beyond that because it really highlights the work they've done at Cal Poly, which is hands-on, experiential activity and group oriented and project-based."

Another key component to the course is a media-rich electronic resume and cover letter, which students can e-mail to potential employers.

"Everything in the course culminates what we're calling e-portfolios," Phelan said. "But essentially it's a preweed Web site." The students learn programs like Adobe Photoshop (for photo editing), Illustrator (to create graphics), Dreamweaver (to design their sites) and Keynote and PowerPoint (both for creating multimedia presentations). The e-portfolios contain information about the students' backgrounds, relevant experience, projects and education.

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He said students who take his class and go into small business will know how to advocate for themselves and promote their business using video. A course requirement is to create a 10-minute documentary about their projects. The key, Phelan said, is the narrative structure.

"A future employer will understand that in being able to tell a story in video and through documentary, they're using one more tool that is really becoming ubiquitous across the Internet," Phelan said.

Being able to record, edit and compress video for the Web or output it to a disc is a valuable skill for students as they will graduate ready to enter the workforce. With the rise of sites like You Tube that make video easy to learn in a class setting than on a computer, and those who best learn how to manage that information are a step ahead of the game.

Fronza Graham, a.k.a. Vicu, a video about this project and be directed to the students' video, Phelan said, is the narrative structure. "What is great about this class is all the skills are life skills we will use once we get into the real world," Graham said.

"The best part is at the end of it we will have our own personal Web site to send to potential employers so they can learn more about us," Bevan said, "I think it will put us ahead of the rest." Journalism senior Aaron Bevan, one of the five students enrolled in the class winter-quarter is building his Web site around a new teenage after-school program called Pink and Blue Chefs. He is filming a documentary to promote the program, which teaches seventh and eighth graders nutrition and culinary skills.

"It's really important to promote yourself as a student," Bevan said. "You need something to communicate to (recruiters) that you've done something, and what better way than on the Web?"

Although tackling complex web languages is a challenge, Bevan said, it's easier to learn in a class setting than on your own. The curriculum seems intimidating at first, Phelan said, but because students are applying the technology to a project they're passionate about, it's easier to grasp.

"These are user-friendly programs. Dreamweaver, which is the most sophisticated web building software program on the planet, happens to be the easiest, most intuitive (and) helpful," Phelan said.

His students were able to create basic Web sites with hypedoks on the first day of class, and some have gone onto more advanced, highly-graphic based sites and HTML coding.

"That's the exciting part," Phelan said. "To see the students tackle these projects and complete them with energy to spare."

The KINE 470 class will be offered again spring quarter and is offered to students with at least a junior standing.
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As college donating falls, schools think long term

Justin Pope
ASSOCIATED PRESS

The legions of fundraisers colleges hired during the boom years have a new mission for these tough economic times: Go easy on the hard sell. Talk about financial aid, not shiny new buildings. If prospects can't give now, lay the groundwork for when the economy recovers.

Victoria Gorrell, the head fundraiser at Kalamazoo College in Michigan, recently visited a Chicago attorney who'd been a generous supporter, hoping to persuade him to keep up his $5,000 annual gifts. He cut back to $1,000 instead.

"But I know he cares and he'll continue to give as he's able, and someday when things improve that will (go up again)," Gorrell said. She's optimistic, but admits more people are telling her, "Gosh, you must have a really hard job.

A survey released Wednesday shows colleges raised a record $31.6 billion in the fiscal year ending last June 30 — an apparent sign the mass fundraising engine of American higher education was revving even as the economy slowed.

But nearly 27 percent of that went to just 20 institutions, led by Stanford ($795 million), Harvard ($650 million) and Columbia ($495 million), taking out those 20, fundraising fell 6.4 percent last year.

And now, to many colleges trying to replenish drained endowments, even that modest decline feels like a painful out-of-date postcard from a non-departed golden era of college philanthropy.

The year's numbers will almost certainly be worse, as colleges postpone big campaigns to avoid winning them fall short, and renegotiate some pledges to spread them over more years.

One sign of the drop: In the last six months of calendar 2008, Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy identified 441 announced gifts of $1 million or more to higher education - 14 percent fewer than the same period in 2007. The combined value of those gifts was $8.5 billion — down 40 percent from the year before.

"There's no sugarcoating the fact that it's not going to be a good period," said Ann Kaplan, who directs the annualVoluntary Support of Education survey for the New-York-based Council for Aid to Education. Informally, colleges have reported to her donations "hit a wall" last month.

Historically, college giving holds up well in recessions under 8 months. But this one is 15 months and counting. And long bear markets not only hurt donors' wealth but lessen the tax incentive to donate appreciated securities. Stocks were at six-year lows this week.

For college fundraisers — a profession that has grown exponentially in the economic downturns mean a delicate balancing act. Their institutions are facing urgent budget shortfalls. But long-term, they can't afford to alienate donors by looking greedy.

"The first thing we do when we sit down with people is we acknowledge we know times are tough," said Michael Brinsworth, vice president for advancement and college relations at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. These days, his pitch it's, "I'd like to have dinner with you and I promise I won't ask you for any money.

St. Olaf's annual fund is down a modest 5 percent compared to last year. Stillworth said Luckie School, the school is between campaigns. It's focused on engaging more alumni in college life, hoping they'll donate later.

One project brings alumni in business to campus to work with students in a finance club. While visiting, they have lunch with the president and meet faculty.

Indiana University, which took in $486.1 million last year, was one of eight public universities to make U.S. News Top 20. This year, its sights are lower: It's hoping the number of donors to its foundation will decline by no more than 10 percent, said foundation President and CEO Gene Tempel.

Indiana alumni will be among those finding the annual fundraising phone call less pushy this year; the foundation recently changed the script callers read to start with an acknowledgment times are tough.

Still, the news isn't all bad. After nearly completing a $1 billion campaign, Indiana recently announced plans to raise another $100 million in the next 18 months. Earlier this month the business school there received $15 million.

While stock gifts are down, charitable annuities — which offer donors reliable income — have become relatively more appealing.

Donors give up front, take a tax deduction, and receive interest income for the rest of their lives. After their deaths, the university keeps the principal. The pace of such gifts at Indiana has doubled compared to last year.

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"Everyone understands why we're coming and they're not refusing appointments," he said. "But they ask us for signals we're sensitive to the situation, and we signal right away we absolutely can.

Gorrell, from Kalamazoo, says while some donors have cut back others have given more, like a Philadelphia businessman who recently offered $20,000 on top of his regular gift.

For colleges, development offices are tweaking targets for budget cuts (Indiana's foundation employs 200 people in fundraising and endowment management). But that could hurt in the long run. Kalamazoo is cutting in college magazine from three issues a year to two to help avoid cutting staffers.

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Alisha Axson
MUSTANG DAILY

Cal Poly students are accustomed to the sight and sound of bicyclists whizzing by on campus. On Sunday, anyone on campus will have their senses intensified as the Cal Poly Wheelmen race through campus this weekend.

"The Campus Criterium is something we've always done," said director Kathryn Hicks. "It's a fun event because we're on campus and we usually get a lot of people out to support the wheelchair." Hicks said the race could have as many as 200 riders from around California and Nevada, including 50 members of the Cal Poly Wheelmen Club.

There will be a total of six races run beginning with an 8 a.m. men's race. The finale, which begins at 11:20 a.m. will pit the fastest and the strongest of the men's races against each other in the 60 minute race.

The wheelmen will also participate in a Saturday race at Camp San Luis Obispo military base where they will ride a five-mile course multiple times.

The wheelmen are no strangers to racing on the Central Coast, even on the professional level. As members of the group went to see the AMGEN Tour of California which made a stop in Paso Robles earlier this month.

"A bunch of us went to the stage in Paso Robles," Hicks said. "We were lucky enough to get some passes that gave us really a good spot on the course — right by the finish line." Lucky is perhaps an overstate-

McBride added that she can yell at Harrison because her roommate knows she is just trying to help her. "We know each other so well that she has also contributed to our communication on the court.

"We have a much better connection because of being roommates and best friends," McBride said.

Harrison said, "We look for each other and we know exactly what the other person is going to do because we've played so long together." Harrison added, "We're always looking out for each other."

As three-year varsity veterans, Harrison and McBride have earned their share of accolades. Last year Harrison scored 427 points and 221 rebounds, becoming the first player to pick up both 400 points and 200 rebounds since Sherrie Astrom (1986-87). An All-West first team selection last year, Harrison is one of eight players in Cal Poly women's basketball history to score 1,000-plus career points. Currently, she is second in average points per game (12.5) and has a .753 free throw percentage.

Harrison recently became the second-leading scorer in school history, passing Christine Rodness against Pacific on Feb. 21.

"Megan is simply a dominating presence on the court," head coach Faith Mimnaugh said. "There's certainly some fine talent in the Big West, but Megan is someone who could lead the conference in scoring and rebounding. Megan is a tremendous player and I would expect another All Big West first team performance from her."

Harrison was selected as the Big West Player of the Week twice last year and led the Mustangs in free throw percentage (.813, 2nd in the conference). The sophomore forward scored 64 points in re-rank of every day," McBride said.

Both Harrison and McBride are leaving no stone unturned when it comes to finishing their collegiate careers. Harrison plans to take the comment "Every day I try to have fun at practice and not get down and real-
ize it's coming to an end. I try to give everything I have every day so I don't look back two months from now and realize I didn't give everything."